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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2608
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6437
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0270
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4227
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2824
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1441
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1006

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 005390

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AFIN](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [OREP](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR CODEL DODD, DECEMBER 19-21

REF: SECSTATE 197558

¶1. (U) Embassy Damascus welcomes and grants country clearance for the visit of Senator Christopher Dodd, and the other members of his delegation: Ms. Janice O'Connell (SFRC), and COL Mike Barbero, U.S. Army Senate Liaison.

¶2. (U) Control officer and point of contact for this visit is Pol/Econ Counselor Todd Holmstrom, who can be reached at work: (963)-(11) 3391-4287; cell: (963) 094-270-556; home: (963)-(11) 611-3237; or embassy fax number: (963)-(11) 3391-3999.

¶3. (U) Fiscal Information: Thank you for the fiscal data for the costs of the visit. Costs include, but are not limited to, American and FSN overtime, border crossing fees, field travel by Embassy employees, transportation costs for official vehicles, long distance telephone calls, equipment rentals, representational events, and other costs directly attributable to the visit.

¶4. (U) Visa Requirement: Every traveler must have a valid Syrian visa prior to departure for Damascus. The Syrian government will not normally grant airport or border visas. Travelers should apply for visas well in advance, as processing time is often slow. Currently, Syrian visas for Americans can only be issued by the Syrian Embassy in Washington. Persons traveling on passports bearing an Israeli visa or entry or exit stamp, or persons born in the Gaza region or of Gazan descent, will be refused entry to Syria. The Syrian government rigidly enforces restrictions on prior travel to Israel. Israeli stamps in passports, Jordanian entry cachets, or cachets from Egypt or other countries that suggest prior travel to Israel, may cause Syrian immigration authorities to refuse the traveler admission to Syria. Likewise, the absence of entry stamps from a country adjacent to Israel, which the traveler has just visited, will cause Syrian immigration officials to refuse admittance. American citizen travelers suspected of having traveled to Israel have been detained for questioning.

¶5. (U) Security Requirements: Post did not see security clearances for the delegation in the country clearance request, which should be provided via e-mail or cable.

¶6. (U) Transportation: Controloff and an embassy expediter will meet Senator Dodd and the other members of his delegation on December 19 at the Damascus airport. Post will also arrange for transportation to and from official meetings.

Controlloff and expediter will see Senator Dodd and his delegation off at the Damascus airport on December 21.

¶17. (U) Accommodation: reservations were made for the delegation at the Four Seasons for December 19-21. Confirmation numbers are 131770, 131772, 131774. Hotel telephone number is 963 (11) 339-1000, fax: 963 (11) 339-1009. The daily room rate is USD 110, plus 10 percent service charge, and 11 percent tax, breakfast not included. The maximum time granted for free cancellation is six p.m. on the day of arrival.

¶18. (U) Communications Support: Post will provide Senator Dodd and other members of his delegation with an international cell phone for official use while in-country. Long-distance telephone calls can also be placed from the Embassy. The internet can be accessed through a stand-alone PC in the Embassy. There is no charge for this service. The internet can also be accessed from hotels in Damascus by dialing to one of three different ISP's in Syria.

¶19. (U) Currency Exchange: As the delegation will overnight in Damascus (per reftel), Post will disburse per diem to the delegation for December 19 and 20. The Embassy Class B Cashier provides exchange from dollars to Syrian pounds at the current rate for institutions, against cash, traveler's checks, and, with the authorization of the financial management officer, personal checks. Reverse accommodation exchange is not authorized, in accordance with Syrian government regulations. Personal checks cannot be cashed on the final day of the employee's stay. The last check must be presented at least one day before departure. Travelers can also purchase pounds at branches of the Commercial Bank of Syria. It is illegal to exchange money except at authorized exchange points (i.e., the Embassy and branches of the Commercial Bank).

¶110. (U) Photography: Photography of individuals in uniform (including police), government buildings, and military installations is strictly forbidden.

¶111. (U) Departure Tax: Syria charges a departure tax of SP200 (approximately \$4), payable in SP cash only. Travelers with diplomatic passports are exempt, but those with official passports must pay.

¶112. (U) Health: Health facilities in Damascus are not up to U.S. or European standards, and facilities outside Damascus are extremely limited. Only personnel covered under the State Department's medical program and with a valid medical clearance for Syria are eligible for medevac at USG cost. It is recommended that all other travelers have medical evacuation insurance sufficient to cover evacuation by chartered air ambulance, or ensure that their agency will cover the cost.

¶113. (U) Threat Assessment: Political developments and security in the Middle East sometimes change quickly. The Embassy was attacked, without warning, in September 2006, by a small group of terrorists using automatic gunfire and grenades. They attempted, unsuccessfully, to detonate a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at the rear gate. One local guard was seriously injured and there was at least one Syrian fatality in addition to the killing of the four attackers. Since the attack, the Embassy has taken additional measures to improve its security posture.

In February 2005, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon was assassinated in Beirut, prompting the U.S. to recall its Ambassador to Syria for consultations. There are no plans to assign a replacement, reflecting the ongoing difficulties in U.S.-Syrian relations. Government-sanctioned demonstrations have occasionally included expressions of anti-American or anti-Western sentiment. Violent mobs attacked three Scandinavian embassies in February 2006.

In general, Americans in Syria should vary their schedules, avoid large crowds and gatherings, and report suspicious incidents to the Regional Security Officer. They should also avoid electronic financial transactions and should not carry valuables or large amounts of cash in crowded shopping districts. Visitors should also read and follow the guidance in the latest public announcements and State Department travel advisories for Syria.

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